



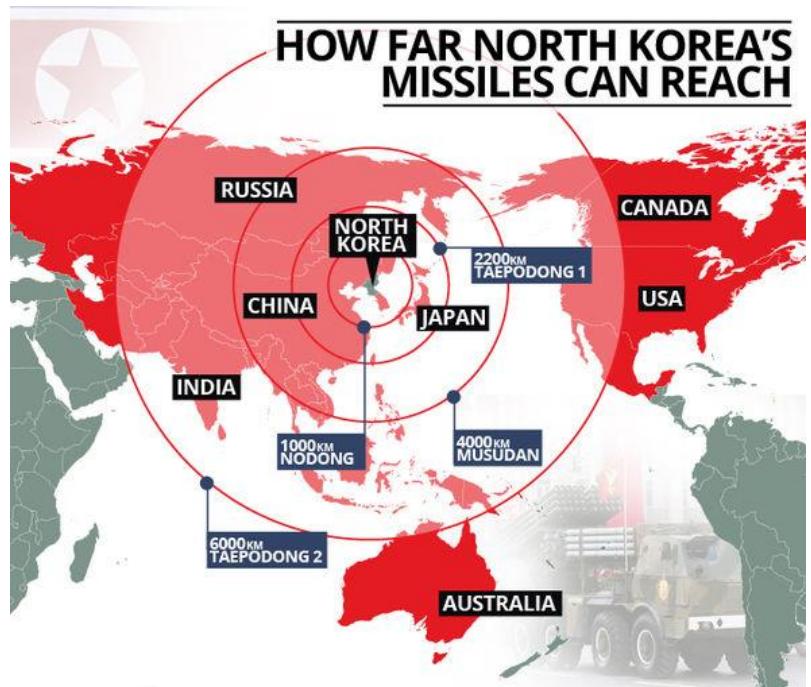
North Korea Nuclear Crisis

"If they believe they can frustrate us with sanction, they are totally mistaken."

- North Korea's foreign Minister, Ri Su Yong
(April 2016)

OVERVIEW

The North Korea Nuclear Crisis is an issue that has troubled international relations and stability especially in Eastern Asia for more than a decade. When Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) began testing its nuclear weapons in 2003, much of the world clamored to stop the growth of North Korea's nuclear program. Many of North Korea's neighbors, including South Korea, the People's Republic of China, and Japan, grew worried about their own security in the face of a nuclear equipped North Korea. With the help of the United States and the Russian Federation, these five nations tried to reach a compromise with North Korea to stop the latter's nuclear program and keep it happy at the same time; these negotiations have become known as the Six-Party Talks.



However, the Six Party Talks have yielded little progress in denuclearizing North Korea, and some experts think that the country is determined to be recognized as a nuclear weapon state. In 2012, its leadership included a new preamble to the constitution that describes the country as a "nuclear state and a militarily powerful state that is indomitable."

In recent years, North Korea is seen more belligerent and uncooperative than ever despite China's continuous press on returning to the talks. Relations between Pyongyang and Beijing have been frosty since Kim Jong Un succeeded his late father as dictator. To everyone's dismay, North Korea has grown increasingly isolationist by distancing herself from China. DPRK's unpredictable and clandestine actions have put her neighbors and other nations in distress.



BACKGROUND

In 1994, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors were kicked out of North Korea. In response, the IAEA asked the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to approve a special inspection of North Korea's nuclear facilities. When UNSC approved the inspection, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In an effort to prevent that, the United States entered into bilateral negotiations with the DPRK government. On October 21, 1994, the United States and North Korea signed the *Agreed Framework*, which required North Korea's freezing of all production of its nuclear reactors used (or thought to be used) to construct nuclear weapons. In return, the United States would supply North Korea with oil.

THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY (NPT)

In 1968, the NPT was established; the treaty includes states that do not have nuclear materials as well as those that do. The NPT recognizes only the USSR, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and China as nuclear weapon states; any nations with nuclear weapons that sign the NPT agree not to transfer any nuclear technology to countries that do not have nuclear programs. Non-nuclear states agree not to start any nuclear weapons programs. The last portion of the treaty states that any nation who ratifies the NPT would be subject to inspections by the IAEA. North Korea ratified the NPT in 1985, and currently 190 countries have signed the treaty.

INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA)

The IAEA was founded in 1957 as a result of rising international fears of nuclear programs being used for weaponization. The IAEA also functions as an international inspection and enforcement body, and is essentially the leading global authority on nuclear technology. By signing the NPT, countries make themselves subject to random inspections of their nuclear facilities by IAEA officials.



In January 2003, North Korea left the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and has since tested nuclear weaponry. In response, in August 2003, the People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea, the United States, Japan, and the Russian Federation came together with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Beijing, China to discuss the concerns about North Korea's nuclear weapons program. There was a constant threat that North Korea would test nuclear weapons if the talks did not establish a compromise.

SIX-PARTY TALKS: ROUND ONE THROUGH SIX; 2003-2007

The first real step to disarming DPRK came when North Korean officials allowed unofficial inspectors from the United States to tour the Yongbyon nuclear research center in January 2004. The Six-Party Talks continued for three rounds, when, during the third round, the United States offered fuel aid to North Korea if they abandoned their nuclear program. The North Korean government took this under advisement, but decided to reject the United States offer.

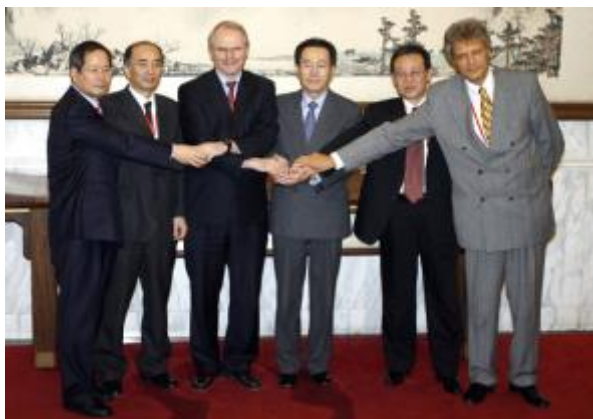


In the fourth round of talks in 2005, a joint statement was made where DPRK agreed to abandon its nuclear program, rejoin the NPT and allow the reentry IAEA monitors in exchange for food and energy assistance.

However, the talks fell apart when DPRK stepped up provocations, testing a long-range rocket and holding its first underground nuclear explosion in the latter half of 2006.¹ UNSC imposed economic and trade sanctions on North Korea.² The sanctions allowed other nations to inspect cargo coming in and out of North Korea, looking primarily for nuclear-related weaponry or materials. DPRK did not agree to have all their imports and exports inspected. Simultaneously, UNSC urged North Korea to end their nuclear weapons program and return to the Six-Party Talks, which North Korea had been boycotting for over a year. Even the delegations from the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, both allies of North Korea, agreed to the sanctions. The North Korean representative walked out of the Security Council.³



Aerial shots verifying DPRK's nuclear plant at Yongbyon

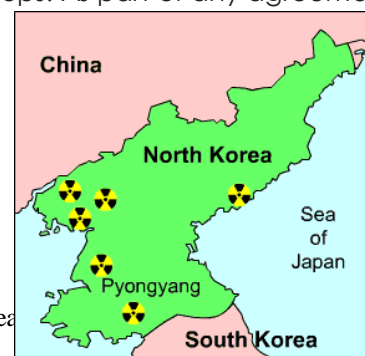


Tensions continued until China persuaded North Korea to reconsider participation in the Six-Party Talks. During the sixth round of talks in 2007, DPRK announced that it would begin shutting down the Yongbyon cooling tower, an important aspect of the process of making nuclear weapons; this offer was contingent upon the United States agreeing to take them off the "states-sponsored terrorism list." The progress of denuclearization gained momentum when the Yongbyon cooling tower was destroyed and North Korea allowed UN inspectors into the country for the first time since 2003 when they left the NPT. Nevertheless, the compromise did not last very long.

OBJECTIVES FOR PARTIES INVOLVED

United States: For Washington, the Six Party Talks serve as a platform for the multilateral mediation of North Korea's nuclear program. The chief U.S. concern remains Pyongyang's nuclear program and the possible sale of nuclear materials and technology to hostile states and terrorist groups. As part of any agreement, Washington wants the reclusive state to consent to visits from IAEA monitors.

North Korea: The regime seeks a nonaggression security pledge from the United States, which deploys 28,500 troops in South Korea and maintains



¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6032525.stm>

² <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/02/10/nkorea.timeline/>

³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/un-imposes-sanctions-on-north-korea>



heavy naval presence in the Pacific. Pyongyang also wants normalized relations with Washington and access to economic aid from other Six Party countries.

South Korea: Frozen in an unresolved conflict with North Korea, Seoul's ultimate goal is the denuclearization and reunification of the Korean peninsula. The South also wishes to liberalize North Korea's decrepit economy through greater financial engagement aimed at mitigating the potential cost of future reunification.

China: Beijing serves as Pyongyang's long-standing ally and main trade partner and has used its influence to bring North Korea to the negotiating table. Although this leverage has boosted its relations with Washington, Beijing also fears a rush of refugees across its border and has thus provided the North with energy and food assistance. In March 2013, China finally agreed to sponsor UN sanctions alongside the United States, and it has since then increased its rhetoric for the resumption of talks.

Russia: Moscow's position at the table allows it to reassert its influence in Northeast Asia. Although it has traditionally joined China in warning against harsh sanctions, North Korea's recent provocations have driven it to issue condemnations against the regime's nuclear testing. Russia ultimately backed renewed UN sanctions against Pyongyang over its third nuclear test, and it has consistently expressed concerns about the North's activities.

Japan: Tokyo worries that North Korea's missile tests could potentially reach Japan. But it also views the Six Party Talks as a forum for negotiating a resolution to the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean spies in the 1970s and 1980s. The issue remains a divisive point in U.S.-Japan relations, as Tokyo had not wanted Washington to remove North Korea from its State Sponsors of Terrorism list until the issue was resolved.

DISCONTINUATION OF TALKS; 2009

In April 2009, North Korea launched a nuclear device over the Pacific Ocean in the direction of Japan; the UN actively condemned North Korea for testing the missile and threatened actions in response. UNSC imposed new and tougher sanctions on North Korea. Resolution 1874, unanimously passed in the Security Council, banned any weapons exports or imports to North Korea except for small arms.⁴ UN inspectors again were kicked out of North Korea. In response, the United States put North Korea back on the list of states sponsoring terrorism; North Korea abandoned the Six-Party Talks. The following month, DPRK conducted a nuclear weapons test underground.⁵ North Korea continued its aggression throughout 2010, sinking South Korean navy ship, shelling the South Korean island Yeonpyeong and revealing a new uranium enrichment facility at Yongbyon.



⁴ <http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9679.doc.htm>

⁵ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/10/04/AR2006100401067.html#2007>



BIRTH OF NEW LEADERSHIP; 2012

December 17th of 2011 marks the death of Kim Jong-Il and the succession of his son, Kim Jong Un, as the new leader of DPRK. In February 2012, Kim Jong Un agreed to suspend nuclear tests and allow IAEA back in to monitor activities at Yongbyon.⁶ But hopes were shattered in December, when North Korea launched a long-range rocket boosting the credentials of Kim and stepping up the threat it poses to its opponents.⁷

UNSC condemned North Korea for launching the rocket with China, who took an uncommon step by joining the criticism as the North's main ally. The resolution ratcheted up existing sanctions on North Korea. It added four organizations and six individuals to an existing blacklist, including the North Korean space agency, the Korean Committee for Space Technology, and threatened more measures for any new launchings.⁸

In response, North Korea threatened to accelerate its military advances and rejected any efforts to resume the six-party talks. In February 2013, the DPRK conducted its long-threatened third nuclear test. The test was seen as push by Kim Jong Un for credibility. Shortly after, North Korea declared that it would no longer abide by the 1953 armistice that halted the Korean War and cut off the last remaining military hot lines with South Korea.⁹

UNSC instructed North Korea to cease all nuclear and missile testing and ordered new economic sanctions on North Korea in response to the third nuclear test in February 2013. The sanctions placed new constraints on North Korean diplomats, raising their risk of expulsion. They also banned specific high-tech items used in the nuclear program, outlawed some banking transactions, impounded cash and carried out a more stringent inspection of ships bound to and from North Korea.¹⁰

TENSIONS CONTINUE; 2013-PRESENT

North Korea demanded the lifting of the UN sanctions and an end to joint American-South Korean military exercises as preconditions for starting dialogue to defuse tension on the Korean Peninsula. By making demands that both the United States and South Korea had no intention of accepting, North Korea signaled that it would not stand down anytime soon from a military standoff that had lasted for weeks. In May 2013, the DPRK launched a total of six short-range projectiles into the waters off its east coast.¹¹ In March 2014, North Korea and South Korea fired artillery shells across their disputed western sea border, escalating military tensions a day after the North threatened to conduct more nuclear tests.

After international powers reached an agreement on Iran's nuclear program in July 2015, there was speculation over whether a similar deal could be brokered with North Korea. However, a number of regional experts have pointed to major differences between Pyongyang and Tehran, such as regime characteristics, the status of weapon development, and connections to the world economy as reasons

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/01/world/asia/us-says-north-korea-agrees-to-curb-nuclear-work.html?pagewanted=all>)

⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/11/north-korea-rocket-launch-2012_n_2280964.html

⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/world/asia/security-council-condemns-north-korea-rocket-launching.html>

⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/asia/north-korea-shuts-last-remaining-hotline-to-south.html?ref=world>

¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/world/asia/north-korea-warns-of-pre-emptive-nuclear-attack.html?pagewanted=all>

¹¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/world/asia/north-korea.html?ref=world&_r=0



why such a deal could not be replicated. Others claim that the Kim regime's use of nuclear development to sustain its survival rules out the possibility of an effective deal.



In September 2015, DPRK confirmed that it had put its Yongbyon nuclear plant back into operation¹² and in December DPRK announced it had successfully carried out a hydrogen bomb test, which is regarded as its fourth nuclear test.¹³ UNSC was set to implement significant punitive measures against North Korea. It condemned the test as a clear violation of resolutions and of the nonproliferation regime.¹⁴ In March 2016, the council approved a resolution that contained the most stringent measures yet to undermine the North's ability to raise money and secure technology and other resources for its nuclear weapons program.

North Korea ruled out resuming the stalled six-party talks despite repeated urgings of China.¹⁵ Defying the UN, in August and September 2016, DPRK repeat fired ballistic missiles off its east coast towards Japan. North Korea's attitude towards denuclearization had been erratic and unpredictable and in recent years North Korea has grown increasingly uncooperative and aggressive. China is often seen as the key to making the international sanctions work, although ties have frayed over the nuclear and missile tests, because she is the North's neighbor and only major ally. China has been more robust in its enforcement than it has in the past and has increased inspections of trade at the border with North Korea. But it needs to do much more. There are steps that China could take immediately to up the pressure on DPRK, such as cutting off trade and oil links, and banning North Korean planes from entering Chinese airspace. China could also stop state-owned and private firms from doing business in North Korea, such as in 2013, when the Bank of China stopped dealings with the North Korea Foreign Trade Bank, cutting DPRK off from a key source of foreign currency.

WHY DOES CHINA SUPPORT NORTH KOREA?

North Korea serves as a buffer for China between it and South Korea, a key US ally and mutual defense signatory. North Korea is also a major tool for Beijing in the bigger chess game of US-China relations in the Asia Pacific region. History also plays a part, though less and less as the current generation of North Korean and Chinese leaders are more detached from the Korean War, during which Mao Zedong sent troops to support Kim Il Sung.

¹² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34254634>

¹³ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/05/asia/north-korea-seismic-event/>

¹⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/06/asia/north-korea-hydrogen-bomb-test/index.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1980008/north-korea-dismisses-restarting-stalled-six-party>



QUESTIONS:

- To what extent should the international community be responsible for policing individual nations' nuclear programs?
- Is it fair that the five Nuclear Weapon States be allowed to maintain their arsenals, while other nations are penalized for maintaining theirs?
- Should countries depend so much on China to denuclearize North Korea?
- What can China do to make progress in North Korea's denuclearization without infringing upon North Korea's political autonomy?
- Are economic sanctions effective means to stop North Korea's nuclear development? What else can be done?
- What can the international community do to make North Korea open up?

